

# via pacis

*The voice of the Des Moines Catholic Worker community*

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## Road Trip Report: National Catholic Worker Gathering, October 2022

by Frank Cordaro

I've just returned from the national Catholic Worker gathering in Worcester, Massachusetts, which celebrated the Mustard Seed Catholic Worker's fiftieth anniversary. For an old guy like me, I got to see people I have not seen in years, many of them faith mentors who have had a major influence on me and who I have become.

One of the most significant of these is Liz McAlister, wife of Phil Berrigan and mentor to several generations of peacemakers, who I actually saw before the gathering.

My first night out of Des Moines I spent with my brother Tom, who lives just outside of Chicago. My brother Joe graciously drove me. We picked up some folks I've known since the 1980s: Mike Miles, Barb Kass, and Al Zook, meeting them at their Anathoth Catholic Worker Farm in Luck, Wisconsin. My ride to the East Coast was a great little reunion!

The next day, Mike, Barb, Al, and I headed to New London, Connecticut to visit Liz McAlister. She was the wife of Phil Berrigan and mentor to several generations of peacemakers, and she made a particularly significant impact on my life. We spent two nights hosted by Frida and Kate, Liz's daughters. Liz is living in a memory unit in a local nursing home. It's a beautiful place right along the river. Ironically, finished nuclear-capable Trident submarines sail along the river from the nearby GE plant to the Navy base on the coast. Both the plant and base have been the site of numerous protests over the years, many of which Liz attended.

It's never easy to see a loved one, especially a mentor like Liz, so diminished in



A Catholic Worker reunion, from left to right: Al Zook, Frank Cordaro, Mike Miles, Liz McAlister and Barb Kass

her physical and mental capacities. Still, Liz has not lost her good and welcoming spirit. She's getting the best of care. Her daughters make sure of that.

My best moment for the whole trip was with Liz, when we prayed together outdoors and considered the readings of the day with personal reflections. When Liz spoke she was clear and insightful, though she seemed to be talking to a different crowd from one thought to the next. It brought to mind the morning community prayer time at Jonah House. I remember once telling Bishop Dingman the most impressive thing I found at Jonah House was the community's daily reading of scriptures and prayer.

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## CATHOLIC WORKERS NEEDED!

by Austin Cook

When I moved into the Des Moines Catholic Worker in late September 2020, I told Frank I expected to be here for two to three years. I knew there were some other things I wanted to do. This article is my attempt to explain my next steps in life and encourage young people to move into the Des Moines Catholic Worker.

I first want to give thanks for the Des Moines Catholic Worker. I entered the community ignorant of many of the practices of the Catholic Worker; I had only read the Aims and Means and was struck by the succinct outline of gospel living, expressed more faithfully and authentically than I had ever seen. I knew it was what I was meant to do, or at least a step in the right direction.

My time here has been filled with trials and joys. I always tell people the easy part of living at the Des Moines Catholic Worker is opening up the soup kitchen. Of course, it's a lot of labor, but it's all simple tasks that can be done meditatively and with teams: picking up food from Whole Foods, Hy-Vee, and individual donors; organizing the store room, cooking and serving food, talking with guests, and sweeping and washing dishes. The challenging bit for me has been living with ten or more distinct individuals who each have distinct pasts, aspirations, levels of commitment and power in the community, and strengths and weaknesses. I have read more than twelve books during the last year on communication, organizational structure, facilitation, and meetings alone, let alone the



Group photo at the 2022 Midwest Catholic Worker Sugar Creek Retreat (the 2023 retreat will be September 8-10)

Bible, black history/thought, and spiritual books. At times, the level of conflict in the community made me wonder if I was going crazy. But there aren't many other problems I would rather have because I encounter them along the path of peace, love, understanding, equity, and revolution rather than wealth, greed, and selfishness.

I am at a crossroads. Do I continue down the path of the Des Moines Catholic Worker, or do I chart another direction? To discern my answer, I've decided to spend the summer months, and quite possibly the next six to twelve months, going on Treaty Walks for treaty rights and clean water along the Great Lakes and hopefully visiting other Catholic Worker houses in the United States and Latin America. The goal of this time is to see the bigger picture and how I, as a United States citizen from Urbandale, Iowa, can be a good global citizen - a good neighbor - to my siblings in other states and in this hemisphere.

I love my home. I love Iowa. I love the people in my life and the land I was raised in. I will always carry the people of my life in my heart. I hope to do the same for black and indigenous people across this country, this hemisphere, and

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

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THE DES MOINES CATHOLIC WORKER COMMUNITY

The Des Moines Catholic Worker Community, founded in 1976, is a response to the Gospel call to compassionate action as summarized by the Catholic Worker tradition.

We are committed to a simple, nonviolent lifestyle as we live and work among the poor. We directly serve others by opening the Dingman House as a drop-in center for those in need of food, clothing, toiletries, use of a phone, toilet, shower, or just a cup of coffee and conversation. We also engage in activities that advocate social justice.

BECOMING A DES MOINES CATHOLIC WORKER

We are open to new community members. For information about joining our mission, contact any community member or send an email to dmccatholicworker@gmail.com.

MAILING ADDRESS

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Des Moines IA 50305

BISHOP DINGMAN HOUSE

(Drop-in Center and Business Phone)

1310 7th St.  
Des Moines, IA 50314  
515-214-1030

Hospitality Hours:

Monday and Wednesday: CLOSED

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Sunday: 3-6:30pm  
(meals at 3pm and 6pm)

Saturday: 12-2pm (meal at 12pm)

PHIL BERRIGAN HOUSE

713 Indiana Ave.  
Des Moines, IA 50314

RACHEL CORRIE HOUSE

1301 8th St.  
Des Moines, IA 50314

CHELSEA MANNING HOUSE

1317 8th St.  
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WEBSITE

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As for ourselves, we must be meek, bear injustice, malice, and rash judgment. We must turn the other cheek, give up our cloak, go a second mile.  
-Dorothy Day

“Indifference”

by Tod J. Barry

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Cranston, RI 02920

If James Brown were alive today he would do a new take on “Living in America”  
Bang, bang, I shot em down the children & the innocent bystanders fell to the ground.

-  
Jesus looked down from above, he couldn’t hide his frown.  
The dove transformed into a vulture and circled the land.  
A grieving mother held her dead child’s head in her hand, there was only silence from the marching 4th of July band.  
The crops withered on the vine and the sands of time consumed the once fertile land.

-  
The grim reaper said “check mate” and the Jefferson Memorials sank to the bottom of a tidal basin.  
Old glory waved no more and the 2nd Amendment rights activists lay prostrate at the future (Hitler), at the parlor door.  
The Earth shuttered as the unheard voices cried no more.  
-  
The boulevards and once great avenues turned blood red and the street lamps shine no more. Black ribbons were hung from the wreaths on America’s front doors. Playgrounds became the things of lore as there were no children to play there anymore.  
-  
Tear ducts ran dry and there was no more thread left to mend the broken hearts. The trumpet played taps and the 21 gun salute fell on deaf ears.  
The preacher preached one last time as the flag was lowered from the pole, folded and ceremonially laid to rest on the coffin of the unmanned child.



Art by Tod J. Barry

A Farewell From the Des Moines Intentional Eucharistic Community



A big thank you to our DMIEC volunteers! Seated from left to right: Ellen Corwin (her husband, Chuck, who has passed away), Jeanine Freeman, Mary Tomlinson, Pat Miller. Standing from left to right: Kevin Pokorny, Steve Rottler (his wife, JoDee, who has passed away), Maggie Maloney, Julie Powell-Mohr, Martha Gelhaus.

“Our Catholic Worker group gathered in prayer, laughter, storytelling, and breaking of bread Sunday night. We figured out that we started 35 years ago bringing a monthly dinner to the Catholic Worker. We reminisced about all the people we met at the Catholic Worker throughout those years and how they touched our lives. We are so grateful to have offered hospitality to those in need with food and our presence. Now, it is time to close this chapter in our lives. Many in our group are facing their own aging challenges, and some members have died. We extend all our love and affection to you, Frank, and the people at the Worker.

Julie Powell-Mohr wrote and shared ‘A Blessing for Our Catholic Worker Group’ with us before we dined. Julie’s blessing sums up our collective experiences.”

-Kevin Pokorny, DMIEC

“A Blessing for Our Catholic Worker Group”

by Julie Powell-Mohr, DMIEC, October 9, 2022

This blessing has walked with us  
For at least thirty-five years  
It has held us in the comfort of friendship  
And in the service of our Worker House community–  
Where we have served meals  
And provided for some of the needs of  
The Worker House guests.

But we didn’t know the depth  
Of this blessing  
We didn’t know how we would be  
Knitted together over a lifetime  
Of service and shared laughter  
Knitted together  
By songs and meals  
Through our children  
And a new community  
Through illnesses and loss.  
Knitted together  
Into a shared spiritual journey  
That continues.

We didn’t know  
How we would be changed.

Tonight we celebrate who we have become together  
The habits of heart that have shaped us  
It’s a familiar song  
And we will forever  
Remember its harmonies  
But we are noticing that we are being called  
To something new as elders  
To love more expansively  
To become place-holders  
For peace and love  
And wisdom and justice  
And most of all  
To become fearless in the face  
Of each new day  
To bear witness to the future  
That is unfolding in this new song.

This blessing promises to fill us  
With the spaciousness  
To meet the future with grace  
Not always to understand, but  
To trust that we are shaped by love  
Called to affirm the life of God.

In gratitude for the blessings  
We continue to be for each other.



# Love: Reflections on the Des Moines Catholic Worker

by Claire Lewandowski

I volunteered at the Des Moines Catholic Worker for five weeks as summer turned into fall. The first week felt like freshman orientation to the strangest, most motley university you can imagine: days jam-packed with community meals, sorting through donations, late night conversations, wall-washing, step-sweeping, soul-searching. Over time, this feeling mellowed into something equally busy, but more grounded. It feels almost embarrassing how joyful it was.

When thinking about how to describe my time at the Des Moines Catholic Worker, I wanted some overarching theme to tie all my experiences together. I thought about mercy and the weirdness of the morning I was driving, listening to Peter Gabriel's song "Mercy Street," hearing the line about being back in your father's arms at the same moment a billboard for Mercy One Hospital flashed into view. I thought about boundaries and sacrifice and how my modern life demands boundaries and how the ancient life of Christ demands sacrifice and how these two things could possibly co-exist. I thought about Frank's daily mantra: that all of what we do at the Des Moines Catholic Worker is about standing against war, wealth, and empire.

In the end, however, the thread that ran through those weeks was love. Not a warm, fuzzy kind of love, but a hard, persistent kind. I'm in awe of the community there that works so hard to show love to our guests and each other.

Here's how a day at the Des Moines Catholic Worker goes: Every day except Monday and Wednesday, the focal point of our work is "shift." This is a catch-all word to describe the period from 3pm to 6:30pm when the house transforms into a buzzing hub of activity. We plate and serve nearly a hundred meals to our guests, folks who come to our yard to eat and rest. We take coffee orders and sling cups of water. There's a storeroom in the front of the house with dry goods, donated clothing, toiletries, and all manner of strange items, handed out to whoever needs them. There is the work of just sitting

with the guests and listening to whatever they have to say.

On either end of shift, there is prep work: driving the large white van to different local grocery stores and loading up the back with boxes and bags full of baked goods, prepared foods, cans, and whatever else is a day or two away from its sell-by date, then driving home to play Tetris with our fridge and storeroom shelves. We sort through the constant piles of donations. We cook massive meals in pans so large they need four burners. We set off the fire alarm (okay, that only happened a couple of times). We contemplate what can be made with thirty pounds of canned green beans. There is morning prayer and evening mopping. There is Modelo to be drunk on the porch.

I don't mean to sugarcoat anything; the work there was hard and painful at times. For the members of the community here living in voluntary poverty, there is the precarity of subsisting on the same clothing and food donations as our guests. There are tense interactions. There is loneliness. Community members watch short-term volunteers like me come and go. But all this being said, I do believe that the Des Moines Catholic Worker has the prescription for the good life. Small acts of love, often, power this community. Some of the ways I saw that love in action:

- Early morning - I saw the father of one of our community members watering the tomatoes outside, then leaving as quietly as he had come
- One night - seeing the dirty kitchen floor from a long day of people tracking in dirt from outside, then coming down in the morning to see it had been mopped clean
- Coming downstairs in the morning to see our stainless steel cart replenished with baked goods from Hy-Vee
- Fresh vegetables appearing suddenly at our back



Julie and Annie showing that Catholic Worker love!

- door
- A friend tenderly wrapping my arm in a band-aid after I burned myself with hot oil
- "Para los pajaritos" ("for the little birds") written on the lid of an M&M container filled with popcorn, seeds, and lentils
- Everyone's expertise in removing bats from the house: gently, with gloves, towels, crates.
- A noise outside my door late at night: my housemate, climbing on the step-stool to remove one that had roosted right above the door frame, cognizant of my fear
- How moldy grapes and tomatoes reveal themselves to be mostly fine with the time and attention it takes to separate the good from the bad: the fruit salad and tomato sauce that these things became, with a little time and presence
- Watching my housemates memorize names and faces and coffee orders of our guests

Those that give to the Des Moines Catholic Worker, whether through donations, time, or prayer, give to this good life. I feel grateful that such a place exists, where ordinary people can try out this experiment of loving each other in small ways, often.

## Two New Holy Families

by Araceli Benitez-Moya

Over the last few months the Des Moines Catholic Worker community has opened our doors to two immigrant families to provide hospitality. We have this space because we are very low on community members and it was available.

The first family moved into Dingman House. They are from Colombia (for security reasons we don't mention their names). A woman of 27, her husband and brother, a child of seven, and the father of the woman at 47. The family took a flight from Colombia to Cancun. From Cancun they flew to Mexico City, continuing their journey by a bus trip of three days to get to the United States frontier where their money ran out.

At the United States border, agents of ICE separated the family for two days, sending them to a refugee center, except for the two young men who were deported immediately. However, the family was reunited a few days later when they left the shelter.

With the help of a friend who works with Latinos here in Iowa, we were contacted about the hospitality for this Colombian family.

For five months now they have been living in the Dingman House, doing day labor and getting the paperwork necessary to be in the United States. Because we are so low on community members, they help us serve our regular guests, joining us on shift to serve hot food, give showers, and person a small storeroom filled with donations of clothing, hygienic products, and canned food. Plus, our Columbian mother is pregnant, and the baby is expected this summer!

In December when the Berrigan House opened up, a second family, this one from Honduras, with five members, the father of 29, mother of 27, a ten year old, a four year old, and an infant of five months moved in.

The family decided to leave Honduras because of the gang violence they experienced as they tried to open a local business. They left Honduras, crossed Guatemala, and entered Ciudad Hidalgo in Chiapas, where they were obliged to try the shelters which were all full, causing them to camp out in the provisional camps set up in the various city parks. They did not wait for

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### CATHOLIC WORKERS NEEDED, continued from page 1

around the globe. I hope to carry all these people in my heart as I walk on the rich soils of Iowa and try to love all of my neighbors as myself.

I want to appeal to young people. The Catholic Worker is not a perfect place, but it's the best place I know of in the Des Moines area to learn to do the works of mercy, practice communal living, and become a better human being. I maintain that it's the best live-in community in Des Moines I know of for learning to live out the gospel. I still have a lifetime ahead of me, but in only the past two and a half years, I have learned a boatload about the works of mercy, loving my neighbor, society, politics, the city of Des Moines, immigration and the Spanish language, and ultimately being a lover and disciple of God. I am so thankful to be doing a job for which I can see all the moving parts. I know that we are truly serving people. It feels powerful knowing that I'm doing all I can to serve people, to make life better for others.

I'm not sure every reader will understand this, but during the last two and a half years, I've met many people who are bitter and hate the United States, for reasons I understand. United States law and policy was and is behind the enslavement of their people, the theft and destruction of their land, the imprisonment or murder of their family, and the continuing grinding poverty they experience on a day-to-day basis. This affliction, left to fester, leads to individual bitterness, social unrest, and civil and international war. I think of Jesus' words as he wept over Jerusalem: "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God" (Luke 19:42-44).

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus sends out seventy people to be on mission. He tells them to carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and to greet no one on the way. They are to be focused messengers, proclaiming peace to whatever house they enter, to cure the sick, and to proclaim, "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:9). My little actions of mercy, love, justice, and solidarity is my hope and prayer for a better, more peaceful future; to a future of mercy, not sacrifice, of love and justice, solidarity, compassion, and peace.



# Tiny What?

by Julie Brown

This year has been the year of tiny farms, COVID, and black holes of immigration procedures. I write this from my second home in Iraqi Kurdistan while positive with COVID for the third time this year. Mohammed and I both tested positive last week (the day before I was to return to the Des Moines Catholic Worker). Because of past health issues, my immune system stinks, and I keep getting COVID no matter how hard I try to be safe. This time my father jokingly said it would give the immigration folks more time to approve Mohammed's paperwork so that he could finally fly with me back to the United States.

After years of waiting, in September, Mohammed (my partner) finally got his green card interview! Mohammed and I traveled from Iraqi Kurdistan to the United Arab Emirates where his case is being processed. They then decided to do another round of background checks and sent us home. This additional procedure is something put in place during the last presidency that can be used against people from "certain countries." So, that's where we are. No real timeline. Just waiting again.

When we returned to Kurdistan we had a bit of time off from our work at Community Peacemaker Teams and wanted to do something constructive. We started working on our little farm. In March, we put together our savings and purchased three fourths of an acre in the mountains. We then bought a small three by six meter cabin and had it moved onto the land. In total, it was just over six thousand dollars. Our plan is to eventually stop renting and use this as our residence when in Iraq.

Working and being outside has helped our mental state a lot. When we are using our bodies and minds on a project, we don't think about the Turkish and Iranian bombings, or racist immigration policies. When my hands are in the dirt, I don't have time to replay my anxieties and frustrations about the world. I think this creates a much needed balance and some practice of self care. We are exhausted at night and wake up early, but we are usually both energized for the day ahead.

Sometimes I chuckle and think that Peter Maurin would be proud. The back-to-the-land Catholic Worker folks snuck up on me.

Through this experience I have also started reflecting on how we use language to describe things. What words best describe our new would-be home? When we purchased it, we bought an Iraqi dunam (three fourths of an acre) and a small, repurposed PVC cabin. That's what we actually have. We don't have electricity, and our water comes from a tank that a man with an old tractor fills for us. We use candles for light and small wood fires outside for cooking or making coffee.

In the United States it could be called an "eco-friendly off-grid tiny house"! Ha! How trendy! If we were poor in the United States, people would call the same house a crappy trailer. If we were otherwise unhoused it would be a small shack. If we were refugees or IDPs here, people would call our house a UNHCR cabin (most likely that is what it actually is). Neighbors in the area call their homes villas even if they are very small. But Mohammed and I have the privilege to use any of these words or even make up something new. Mohammed calls it a farm, so I call it a farm, though so far we only have three rows of arugula planted.

All this to say that the little spot in the mountains we are now looking after may not easily be defined, but it has been a blessing. Mohammed has recovered, and my COVID symptoms are getting better, so we are going to the farm today where I can be in the fresh air and far away from the possibility of getting anyone else sick.

In a week I have my rescheduled flight back to Des Moines. It's unlikely that Mohammed will be joining me this time. I want to thank everyone for continued prayers and well wishes for his green card process. We are both looking forward to being Des Moines Catholic Workers together some day soon and bringing our sons too. We are equally excited to continue this experience on our little farm in the mountains when in Kurdistan.



Construction of a new patio made of reclaimed pallets

# Following the Will of God

an update from Reverend Robert Cook

I am completing the seventh month of retirement from ministry as pastor of the United Presbyterian Church of Vail and the United Church of Westside, Iowa. My final Sunday was June 26th. Frank Cordaro, the founder of the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community, had invited me to live in the Manning House of the community, but first, I made a 30-day visit to El Salvador to meet with the team who organizes and maintains "A Legacy of Light," the solar electrification project organized to install solar electricity in the homes of small farm families in the Berlin area in eastern El Salvador. On my return to Des Moines, I came to move into the Manning House where all the residents were COVID infected.

Though it was a disappointment, I found solace in the hospitality I received in the homes of Ed and Betty Thornton and Duane (Doc) and Sheryll Skidmore, who filled me with quality food and gave me shelter until the Worker House residents were well.

This is the second time I have lived at the Worker community. The first time was before I served as pastor for five and a half years at Vail and Westside Churches. At that time, I lived at the Berrigan House Peace and

Justice Center. Manning House is a home for old residents, so I guess it could be considered the retirement home. It functions quite well, as there are five people over 60 years of age who live at the house. It was also the home where Noman Searah, one of the legendary guests in Catholic worker fame, lived in the community for forty years, serving the poor all those years. His health had deteriorated to cause him to take up residence in the University Care Center until his death in January.

It has become apparent to me that the cost of living at the "Manning Retirement Home" is to write an article for *Via Pacis* newspaper each time it is published. Frank has requested nothing from me except an article for the next *Via Pacis*, which is what he asked from me for the publication of the last *Via Pacis*, so, as long as I am alive, living at the Catholic Worker Community, readers of the *Via Pacis* will find an article written by me, asking you to support "A Legacy of Light" solar electrification project for small farm families in eastern El Salvador in the Municipality of Berlin. That is the same area where I was designated missionary by Des Moines Presbytery to serve with the Parish Team of the Parish of St. Joseph from 2000 to 2006. When I retired from the mission work that had become known as Our Sister Parish Mission of Des Moines Presbytery, the Bishop of the Diocese of Santiago de Maria in El Salvador issued me a Catholic Lay Missionary Card, which is the authority by which Fr. Candido in 2016 asked me to organize the Solar Project.

Now, when I ask you to send us a tax-deductible donation of any amount to "A Legacy of Light" addressed to Westside Bank, Westside, Iowa 51467, you probably imagine it would help install solar light when it is dark. Indeed it does. It will also run the computer that the department of education provided for each student in the schools. It will also allow residents of the homes to see the presence of unwelcome vermin, like snakes and scorpions. It could also provide a social environment to see the face of another when they are in conversation.

I am leaving on a jet plane for El Salvador on Saturday, January 28th for six weeks. My return to Iowa will be March 11th.

With \$2800 donations in the bank, the five person team I work with

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Frank Cordaro and Bob Cook in younger days; their friendship is still strong!



# Free Jessica Reznicek Update

Dear Supporters of Jessica,

We write to you with heavy and angry hearts. On January 19th in Atlanta, Georgia a state patrol SWAT team shot and killed the 26 year old forest defender, Manuel Terán, known as Tortugita, while clearing a protest camp for the construction of a massive police urban warfare training facility on public land. Tortugita's murder, according to a professor Woodhouse at Northwestern University, marks the first time in the last century that an environmental activist has been killed in the United States by police protecting a forest.

Although the public forest was set aside for protection by the city in 2017 as a buffer to climate change, the Atlanta city council in 2021 voted to lease the land to the Atlanta Police Foundation for ten dollars a year and pledged millions of dollars of taxpayer money towards the clear cutting of the forest and constructing what has become known as "Cop City." From its beginning, Atlanta residents have opposed the project, citing its environmental and social impact on an already overpoliced black population, but the conservative corporate sponsors of the project, including UPS, the Atlanta Police Foundation, and the lobbying group ALEC, seemed to prevail over the city council. And now, as California floods and the arctic tundra melts, the police murdered one of the brave land defenders, willing to stand up for the forest. After they shot and killed Tortugita, the Atlanta DA charged the other protestors with domestic terrorism, and the judge set their bail at over three hundred thousand dollars each. Tortugita's mother, Belkís Terán, responded to the murder of her child, "They killed Manuel... like they tear down the trees in the forest; a forest Manuel loved with passion."

## Rest in eternal Peace and Power #ManuelTeran.

The reason a state labels someone, or a movement, they disagree with politically as "domestic terrorists" is to dehumanize them to the point that they can murder, imprison, and violate their human rights with impunity in broad daylight. As Kate Aronoff pointedly said in her new article, "If the post-9/11 security state has a mantra, it's that it's easier to get away with killing someone if you can call them a terrorist."

That is why the federal government labeled Jessica Reznicek a terrorist in 2021, citing the need to discourage others from taking similar actions. That is why Georgia labeled #CopCity protestors terrorists in December. The United States government is making environmental protection not just illegal, but analogous with terrorism. The government is doing this so they can give away public land to corporations and militarized police and kill or imprison anyone who gets in the way.

As a child, Jessica Reznicek found peace swimming in the Racoon River near her hometown in rural Iowa. The years passed, she grew up, and as she got older, she witnessed her Racoon River become too polluted to swim in. It wasn't just the Racoon, but all the rivers around her, one by one filled with nitrates and pesticides. In 2016 Jessica heard that a Texas company wanted to build a huge oil pipeline through the farms, forests and rivers of Iowa to take oil from North Dakota down to Texas. She testified to the Iowa Utility Board, asking them to deny the Dakota Access Pipeline permits, saying they had a duty to protect and restore the water and could not let this

corporation from Texas pollute it even more.

Years after the pipeline had been built, federal courts ruled that the permits for the pipeline had been issued illegally without proper environmental review, but in 2016, Jessica watched as government officials ignored her rivers and forests. Construction crews, police task forces, and private security companies eagerly descended on her rivers and forests to ensure that more oil was flowing down to Texas. The public process failed yet again to protect the water she loved and that the people needed to drink. So Jessica Reznicek and a fellow Catholic Worker took action to stop the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline by dismantling construction equipment and pipeline valves before it was operational. In Catholic Worker tradition, she and the other woman owned up to their actions in a press conference. In 2019 she was indicted on nine felonies by the federal government and faced 120 years in prison. In 2021 she accepted a plea deal which would drop eight charges if she pleaded guilty to conspiracy to damage an energy facility, the only charge without a mandatory minimum and sentencing range of zero to twenty years.

Not long before her sentencing, she got word that the feds would seek a terrorism enhancement against her, even though she had not been charged or convicted with a crime of terrorism. The week of her sentencing, the Des Moines Water Department issued a state of emergency because the rivers that they used for their water intake were too polluted to use for the city's drinking water. Jessica looked out at the court and said, "I did this for the water and for the children who need clean water to swim in." The federal judge sentenced her to eight years in prison with a domestic terrorism enhancement, followed by three years of probation and a restitution of 3.2 million dollars to be paid to the pipeline company, Energy Transfer Partners. The judge gave her a month to organize her things before she reported to prison. Apparently Jessica was a terrorist, but she posed no threat to society. When asked about her sentencing, Jess smiled and said, "I was indicted on malicious use of fire when the whole world's burning."

Her legal team appealed the ruling, arguing that the domestic terrorism enhancement was inappropriate to apply to her case. The Center for Constitutional Rights, The National Lawyers Guild, Water Protector Legal Collective, Center for Protest Law & Litigation, Honor the Earth, Climate Defense Project, CodePink, Climate Disobedience Center, and Catholic Social Action filed Amicus briefs in support of Jessica's appeal of the use of the terrorism enhancement.

In 2022 an appeals court upheld her conviction, writing that even if the terrorism enhancement was an error, it was "harmless." Under normal conditions, Jess would have been sentenced to 37 months, but the terrorism enhancement resulted in a sentence of 96 months. Furthermore, there is nothing "harmless" about being labeled a terrorist by the United States government for nonviolent civil disobedience to prevent the worsening of the climate crisis. For a deeper dive into the legal history and court documents, visit <http://supportjessicareznicek.com/legal>.

The water in Iowa is as polluted as ever. The Des Moines Water Department recently announced it would spend 30 million dollars drilling wells in search of clean water. Most cities are discouraged from relying on wells because they

quickly deplete the groundwater, but the utility has been unable to get farmers, manufacturers, and pipelines upstream to reduce the pollution they put in the river.

After Jessica's sentencing in 2021 we cried out, "This is a dangerous precedent! What happens to Jessica happens to all of us!" The Center for Constitutional Rights, along with eight other organizations, warned this would lead to a rapid curtailment of civil rights. What is painfully clear now is that contrary to what the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in Jess's case, there is nothing "harmless" about being labeled a terrorist. The state of Georgia has shown what happens to those labeled terrorists by murdering Tortugita.

Following the precedent set by the Department of Justice in Jessica's case, states are using this moment to pass new anti-terror laws targeting our movement. What happened to Tortugita, Jessica, and the others charged with domestic terrorism is not random. This is part of a broader attempt by the state and fossil fuel corporations to silence - and in the tragic case of Atlanta, murder - those who stand up for the land and waters.

**Our solidarity in this moment needs to be strong and unwavering with the forest defenders in Atlanta and those like Jessica in prison now labeled terrorists by the state for taking climate action. Nineteen people have been charged with twenty domestic terror charges. Of the six people who were charged with domestic terrorism from protesting the state murder of their friend, four were denied bail, and the two who had bail posted were each set at \$355,000. The Atlanta Solidarity Fund is requesting monetary solidarity to bail people out. We encourage you to donate if you can.**

In February Jessica will have been behind bars for a year and a half. Since arriving in prison, she has trained three service dogs as a part of the Paws Program. Recently she shifted her work into the kitchen, where she is enjoying cooking for her fellow inmates. All of us at the campaign to Free Jessica are working to support her in prison and try to get her free. The next legal step we are preparing to take is to appeal to the Biden administration to grant Jessica clemency. We need your help to get Jessica's story out to the public. Please email us at [freejessicareznicek@gmail.com](mailto:freejessicareznicek@gmail.com) to find out how to support. The world needs her and so do we.

**Please write Jessica a letter!**  
**Jessica Reznicek # 19293-030**  
**FCI Waseca**  
**PO Box 1731**  
**Waseca, MN 56093**

For more information on Jessica's campaign and how to support please visit the following:

**Website:**  
**[supportjessicareznicek.com](http://supportjessicareznicek.com)**  
**Facebook:**  
**<https://www.facebook.com/freejessrez>**  
**Instagram:**  
**<https://www.instagram.com/freejessrez/?hl=en>**  
**Twitter:**  
**<https://twitter.com/freejessrez>**



# Norman's Celebration of Life

by Sheri Clemons, *Des Moines Catholic Worker*, 1982/1983

Anyone who knew anything about the Des Moines Catholic Worker up through the winter of 2022 knew Norman Searah. Norman was among some of the first Catholic Workers to join the Des Moines community, which was founded in 1976. Norman arrived in the Summer of 1980 some 43 years ago with the goal of living at Lazarus House until it was brought back to life and rehabilitated. He succeeded and never left.

Norman spent his entire adult life steadfastly building and participating in the rich, vibrant community of hospitality and direct action in Des Moines. So, it was only fitting that the members of the multiple generations of the Des Moines Catholic Worker and its affiliates came to Bishop Dingman House in Des Moines, Iowa, to pay their final respects to Norman at a service of a celebration of his life. Those that could not make it to Norman's Celebration of Life Service sent their respects and condolences. Coffee, tea, soft drinks, cakes, cookies, doughnuts, and chips and dip were served.

People came from the neighborhood and from thousands of miles away. Lay people, clergy, and former clergy from Catholic and non-Catholic traditions attended. Some people had known Norman for the entirety of his tenure at the Des Moines Worker, and some people had only known Norman for a few months. Every person present had been profoundly touched by Norman's generous spirit of hospitality and possibility.

More people than expected arrived at the Bishop Dingman House of Hospitality, so additional seating had to be secured and situated. Seating covered the dining and serving rooms on the first floor of Bishop Dingman house. Old friends and acquaintances who had not seen one another in some time greeted one other warmly. Everyone chatted with old and new acquaintances and told of how they had come to know Norman and how they now missed him before the celebration of Norman's life commenced.

There was a centerpiece at the fore of the dining room, which held a silver urn of Norman's ashes, a stone with the engraved words, "forever in our hearts," a color print of a crucifix, a painting of Norman and his lifelong best friend, Frank Cordaro, a hand-drawn cartoon of Frank and Norman crossing the line at Offutt Air Force Base, a large poster-sized photograph of Norman seated at the dining room table of Chelsea Manning House (formerly known as Lazarus House) with Miss Kitty, a favorite pet of Ed Bloomer's, Norman's trusty cane, loaves and fishes cross necklace, and favorite rosary beads. There were also framed photographs of Norman, two votive candles, a bible, and a scrapbook of Norman's life. Steve Jacobs, longtime friend and member of the St. Francis Catholic Worker community in Columbia, Missouri sang the opening song "Pilgrim" and closing song "Let the Mystery Be." Both mirrored the spirit of Norman's life.

Frank Cordaro, the founder of the Des Moines Catholic Worker, began Norman's celebration of life service with a reading of Mathew's Sermon on the Mount.

Des Moines Catholic Worker, Julie Brown, then read an email from Norman's brother David, written by Norman's sister-in-law, Susan, to the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community:

"I am reaching out to thank you again. As David noted, we plan to place the ashes we received in an urn and bury the ashes in the plot where his mother, Rose, and his father, Andrew, are buried. This will likely not occur until spring as lots of towns do not bury in the winter months due to the frozen ground.

David always shared one memory of his and Norman's childhood. David did not grow up with the rest of his siblings; he grew up in Concord, New Hampshire. Norman, when a child, would come to Concord to visit with



Des Moines Catholic Worker, Austin Cook, and Steve Jacobs from St. Francis Catholic Worker in Columbia, Missouri, celebrating Norman's life through song



Former Des Moines Catholic Workers, Lisa and Brent Vanderlinden, at Norman's Celebration of Life

his little brother, David. During one of these visits, they were in the yard playing lawn jarts. For those of us who remember those, they were large darts that one would throw and attempt to hit a target on the ground (they have since been banned due to their dangerousness). I'll put a picture below. Well at one point, David threw one of these and it ended up hitting the back of Norman's foot and stuck deeply in his foot, coming out of the side of his foot. I'm not sure if Norman ever played jarts with David again!

Frank, I know I said this to you over the phone, but I want to reiterate our thanks for taking care of Norman for as long as the Catholic Workers could and then for seeing that he got the care he needed prior to his passing. I did not know Norman well, but I do know that he was an independent person who stood up for what he believed to be right. He chose a life that suited him and lived his life to the fullest. He found a home and family with all of you in Des Moines. For the love and care all of the Catholic Workers provided to Norman, we are extremely grateful. Please pass on our thanks to everyone who loved and cared for him."

-Susan (and David) Searah

Frank then asked those in attendance to share memories of Norman. People paused for a moment to gather their memories. A number of former Des Moines Catholic Workers shared with us about Norman's penchant for bus trips. Over the years, Norman traveled extensively throughout the United States by bus, visiting other cities and Catholic Worker communities along the way. He preferred to sleep in or around big city bus stations because that is where the poor are, his favorite destination being New York City!

Colyn Burbank, who lived with Norman for a couple of years, shared how oftentimes, Norman would take leave of the Des Moines Worker without disclosing his intended destination and return a week or two later to tell of his journeys. In the meantime, no one knew of Norman's whereabouts.

In late 1982, the community determined that Norman should have his own column in *Via Pacis*, the community newspaper. Thus, "Norman's Whereabouts" became a *Via Pacis* monthly staple, a favorite of most readers. Many at the celebration of life service reported that this was always the first article they read in every issue of *Via Pacis*. Norman's column will be greatly

missed.

People who had edited Norman's column noted that Norman's writing was so unique to him that it was almost impossible to edit without altering his voice. Others noted the rigor and craftsmanship Norman put into his writing.

Almost everybody noted Norman's strong affinity for the guests, the homeless, and low-income people everywhere. When traveling around the country, Norman had a wide range of choices in accommodations, from Catholic Worker communities who knew him to friends' apartments in various locales.

Nonetheless, Norman most often preferred to lodge with homeless and low-income people in city bus stations, shelters, and sometimes outside on the streets.

I had this very experience with Norman. I was appalled to learn that Norman had come to New York City several times, sleeping and basically living at the Port Authority bus station for days, which is illegal. I lobbied Norman for months to stay at my apartment instead of the bus station the next time he visited New York City. He finally agreed.

I met him at the bus station right before midnight on a Friday night, and we went by Uber to my apartment. The next morning, I took him to the Smithsonian Museum of Native American Culture in Lower Manhattan (Norman loved learning about and advocating for Native Americans). At his request, we then went to see the Wall Street bull sculpture and ate a late lunch from food vendors in the park. We then went by city bus to Maryhouse at the New York City Catholic Worker for a visit. Norman was okay on the bus when

*continued on page 11*



# Remembering Norman Searah

I met Norman well before I joined the Des Moines Catholic Worker community, calling and leaving a message with him for Michael Sprong.

“Carlos Fissure?” Michael asked when he called me back.

“Huh?”

“Norman left a message and made sure that I call back, ‘Carlos Fissure.’ So, I’m doing that.”

Months and months later, after visiting the house a lot and hanging out, I moved in, first to Ligutti Attic on May 1, 1985, and in a few weeks, maybe a month, a spot in Lazarus House—at the juncture of the first floor bathroom and the living room desk—opened up for me.

Each night at the end of the evening shift, if I didn’t prevent it, Norman would unplug the phone and take it downstairs to his lair of a bedroom. By then, Jim Harrington, the other community member of the house, had long-since retired to his upstairs bedroom. (I’d like to believe that Norman understood the importance of setting boundaries and getting sleep, but really who knows? I was 19 and loved phones and talking and told myself that it was important to be accessible if someone needed to get through).

That first night in Lazarus, I woke up to strange noises above me, turned on the light, and realized I had a bat in my room. While I love bats in theory, I love bats as part of the ecological web, and I love bats in children’s literature, the fact that one was in my room and scooching across the ceiling upside down terrified me.

Covering my neck, I ran downstairs and banged on Norman’s door and begged him to come “help me” (what this actually amounted to was me standing in the living room and asking Norman if I could help while praying that he couldn’t think of anything for me to do). He came upstairs empty-handed and slipped off his shirt. There was no tennis racquet or fishing net to bully or capture the bat. He talked to the bat calmly, assuring them that they were safe and “your friend Norman is just going to take you outside.” He delicately placed Bat in his blue, short-sleeved shirt, kept petting and reassuring our guest, and released Bat into the night, thanking Bat for the visit. It was an amazing lesson in unexpected hospitality: one of so many that I learned from Norman over the years.

Norman loved to drive. I had bought Kate Miller’s 1972 wood-paneled station wagon for two hundred dollars. We put a LOT of miles on that car, dumpster diving, driving speakers around, taking people to Broadlawns or other appointments. Maybe twice a month, he would drive to visit his friend, Sheryl, who was locked up about an hour away. He would take food to the guys living by the river and the railroad tracks. He would carry people wherever they wanted or needed (or said they wanted or needed). Unfortunately, this vehicle needed oil twice as often as it needed gas and at one point, it just died. Norman was definitely the saddest person in the house when a vehicle didn’t work.

At one point, he decided that several of us—Jim Harrington in particular—were drinking too much coffee. He’d heard that too much coffee was bad for people. He shared this information, and when we informed him that we were fine, he hid the percolator “insides” and the coffee filters. Undeterred, Jim Harrington found a clean sock and used that to brew coffee for a few days until the coffee pot was mysteriously reunited with its guts and filters.

We met at 8 am weekdays for the daily readings and to talk over house stuff. We sat in an anarchistic, loose circle outside of Norman’s room. It was rare that Norman was the first to speak, and sometimes he didn’t say anything. Generally, he focused on the action and moving forward with the day, always where he was going to go and who he was going to spend time with.

Like many Catholic Workers who have left the community over the years, my first thought when the Via Pacis arrived has always been to find Norman’s column and see what he was doing.

The Gospels obviously don’t mention late-model, wood-paneled station wagons, so who knows? I do believe that Bat and Jim Harrington and Kate Miller and so many others who have gone on before us are welcoming Norman home.

*Kari Fisher (aka Carlos Fissure) was at the Des Moines Catholic Worker for several years and later at Omaha St. Anthony’s Shelter. She currently lives in the Twin Cities where she’s a teacher and writer.*



Norman at the Lazarus House Blessing with Bishop Dingman (above)



Last photo of Norman taken by Kathi Sirci, drinking Diet Pepsi at the nursing home.

• • • •

“I am so sad to hear this. I was there when Norman came to the community after having been ‘rolled’ while hitchhiking to California. When I returned to the community after finishing law school, he was the one who welcomed me back with open arms. Others were not so welcoming, but he was so glad to have me return. When he disappeared to Native Lands or to Dubuque with the truck, I dealt with Patti McKee’s anger and tried to explain his need to make these trips. I loved his soul. When he was trying to think of a name for his article, I suggested ‘Norman’s Whereabouts,’ and it stuck! Such a good, peaceful soul.”

*-Donna Henderson, 1979 Des Moines Catholic Worker*



# Seeking Help for Our New Community Members

by Autsin Cook

Recently, two families moved in with us, one from Colombia and one from Honduras (see the article where Araceli introduces them and shares a bit of their stories, page 3). They moved to the United States to escape violence and poverty, to seek a better life for themselves and their children. We agreed to host them for a time until they can get on their feet financially and secure a place of their own. In the midst of many workers leaving and a lot falling on the shoulders of those who stayed, their helping hands have been a tremendous blessing to us and our guests. Each of them joyfully helps in whatever tasks need to be done around the house. They cook delicious food for our guests and for the workers, and their jubilant demeanors have been a balm to my soul when I feel overwhelmed by the grief of the world.

I remember a conversation about loving one's neighbor that happened between Jesus and a lawyer. The lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus said if he would simply love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength and love his neighbor as himself, he would live. The lawyer began that conversation concerned about eternal life. Jesus' answer didn't include the word "eternal." He just said, "Do this, and you will live" (Luke 10:28). Jesus' words refocus attention from a tit-for-tat morality leading to being judged worthy of eternal life to focus on enriching one's life right here, now. Like the lawyer, if we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will live more fully, with more joy. Jesus' example of a good Samaritan loving a Jewish person even emphasizes love across religious and political lines (Luke 10:29-37). I certainly sense that in my experience with our delightful new Colombian and Honduran families. They have helped immensely around the house, and I don't know how we would have made these last few months without them.

While we love working with them, we recognize that they came to the United States to gain financial stability and independence, which we cannot offer them at the Catholic Worker House. They want jobs to provide for themselves. One of the challenges to this end has been navigating the legal processes toward a working permit, a driver's license, and becoming citizens. There are so many hoops to jump through, and it is very expensive to get the legal help needed for essential documents. They didn't come here with a lot of money. They borrowed money to pay for travel, and we Catholic Workers don't have the funds to reduce their debt or get them lawyers.

If you are able to contribute to their legal fund, please send monetary donations earmarked for their travel debt or legal expenses. If you can help them find work, please email [dmcatholicworker@gmail.com](mailto:dmcatholicworker@gmail.com) or reach out to Austin or Araceli. If you have an old car that works that you would like to donate to them, that would be a blessing, as well as any leads or help on apartments, housing, or any additional housing assistance. The men have been working construction for the past several months. They want to work for their living, and they are really good workers with joyful spirits. They would be a blessing to many employers. If you know of any work opportunities, please reach out to someone in the community. In addition, one of the women has a high-risk pregnancy with neurological complications. If anyone is experienced in the medical field, especially in neurology or OB-GYN, and is interested in helping her in any way, please reach out to Frank, Araceli, or Austin.

Just like for all of us, though, the highest priority I have for them is to develop a solid network of community they can give to and receive from this beautiful dance we call life. Spanish speakers who are interested in accompanying these folks in their acclimation to the United States and simply befriending our wonderful friends from Colombia and Honduras would mean the world to them and me. Any help would be greatly appreciated and a step toward peace and the beloved community. God bless you and thank you for reading this.



Reverend Amy and the new kids in the community!



A big welcome to our Honduran family, Nichol, Alexander, Jassiel, Kilian (Kiki), and Angela!

## TWO NEW HOLY FAMILIES, continued from page 3

the transit papers, but headed out walking, sleeping in what parks they encountered or sometimes using local transport mini-buses. They walked for four days in the sun with their backpacks filled with bottled water and powdered milk for the infant, diapers, etc. mostly for the infant who, by that time, was only twenty days old.

On the majority of their trek, they met people of a good heart who gave them food and water. Other times they gave them a place to rest and sleep or a little money. On some occasions they used the money to buy sweets and chocolate to sell on the streets, which helped generate more money to finance the rest of the trek.

They got to a refugee center in Veracruz where three hundred migrants were housed with just three bathrooms. Imagine the chaos trying to go to the bathroom! In the shelter, some in the family were assaulted on several occasions, so they decided to take the train, "La Bestia."

Over the years thousands of immigrants ride the freight trains called "La Bestia," or the Beast, that originates from the border with Guatemala and heads north to the United States border. For decades, thousands of migrants with their families climbed aboard the box cars, taking seats on the roof tops, praying they could flee the violence of their home countries, simple, poor men, women, and children that dreamed the "American Dream." In its long history as the main route of migration, many fatalities have been incurred for everything from the derailments which killed and crippled hundreds over the year. Additionally, the rapes, the disappeared, and the kidnappings by criminal bands have been all too common.

Our Honduran family had to climb aboard and try to stay together as a family. They managed to make it to the roof of a boxcar. For security, they roped the children together and covered the infant in a sheet and plastic, trying to keep the dust away. The train took 26 days to get to the northern border. The family spent another month in a shelter in Piedras Negras, Mexico before crossing into the United States.

Qualifying for asylum, they knew someone in Des Moines and were cleared to move here until their asylum hearing. Once in Des Moines, they needed someplace to stay. Another local Des Moines hispanic family asked us for help to settle this new family. Berrigan House had just opened up, so we invited them in, hoping to give them a bit of love and security.

We can only admire the faith and courage that this family possesses and all those other migrant families who are trying to start a new life in the United States. Just like our Colombian family, we ask our Honduras family to help with the hospitality at Dingman House.

It's really remarkable to see our hispanic families serving our regular guests at Dingman House.

Here at the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community we try to work at helping our guests each day, in one way or another, through our hospitality, love, and respect. Walking with hope and listening, we go with God, and now we are joined in this work by two holy families!



Julie and our newest community member, baby Angela!



# A Reflection on Luke 6

by Austin Cook

Luke 6:30 “Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them back.”

The passage quoted above comes from Jesus’ sermon on the plain. It is toward the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and functions as a backdrop for Jesus’ other teachings on wealth throughout the rest of the gospel. It is straightforward, but it grinds against the structures of our society.

I grew up in suburban Iowa, and the teachings about this verse I heard in the church made this verse convoluted and impossible to practice because this verse assumes one is poor. During the summer of 2020, my theological reflections on wealth and societal structures began with verses like this, especially in Luke. The world was crying out about the pain rooted in systemic injustices, disparities in wealth, and injustice. When I read the above verse, I realized Jesus offered remedies to the problems we face today. Like G.K. Chesterson wrote, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.”

What would it look like for me to follow the teachings of Jesus? The answer is something radically different from my life today. My problem is that many possessions are assumed necessary even though I could do without them. I had often assumed I needed a car, but through the example of Jess Reznicek, I learned I could do without a car. I had assumed I needed a Roth IRA or a 401(k), but through Ed Bloomer and other examples in the Catholic Worker movement, I learned there are alternatives. I had assumed I needed money in the bank, but it is possible to live without a bank account.

The biggest challenge in this radical discipleship practice is relating to wider society. Indeed, the way we structure society makes it difficult to follow Jesus’ teachings about wealth. I realized quickly after joining the Catholic Worker that I could not give to everyone who asks of me if my assets are locked in retirement accounts. If I have fifty thousand dollars in the bank, and someone in need asks me to pay two thousand dollars for their rent, I must give in order to follow the teachings of Jesus. If someone asks for my car, I must give it to them if I am

to follow the teachings of Jesus. I still own a car and some money in the bank, so I am still working toward that ideal, but it at least gives me direction and a goal.



Ed and Julie reflecting on Luke 6.

I recognize that if everyone followed Jesus in this way, our society would be a picture of health, of love and generosity, justice and joy. No one would have unmet needs because everyone would give what they had. It is tempting to bide time hoping that everyone will jump into these teachings with me. It is scary following Jesus alone, but I cannot let fear and worry hold me from following Jesus. Jesus also said, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear... your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:25,32-33). I write this with a measure of desperation, for I know that I worry about what I will eat, what I will drink, and what I will wear. I worry that if I have kids one day, they might not have things to eat, drink, and wear. But I have neighbors today who do not have things to eat, drink, and wear. It is up to me to give whenever they ask me without worry for how I will survive. God will take care of me as well as them. My only order is to follow, to give, and to love.

# Who Are the Actual Domestic Terrorists?

by Bob Watson, originally published in the Cedar Rapids Gazette, October 15, 2022

Ruby Montoya has joined her fellow Des Moines Catholic Worker member, Jess Reznicek, in prison for civil disobedience/plowshares acts against a pipeline and some machines. The United States government labeled these two women domestic terrorists, and they were given six and eight years for damaging machines and a pipeline.

Terror, and terrorism, are terms addressing what happens to humans, not machines. Terrorism is mostly ascribed to acts by governments against their people to keep them cowed and in line with what that government is doing. Terror and terrorism are also ascribed to acts against the government by people who wish to change that government. Jess and Ruby were attacking a pipeline and machines trying to save the waters of Iowa and the climate of the planet because they didn’t see the government trying to save Iowa’s waters or the climate of the earth. No one was injured. No one was terrorized.

Meanwhile in Iowa this summer, we have stories in the newspapers of what industrial agriculture is doing to people, not machines, in Iowa. Because of the drift of agricultural chemicals, people’s gardens and money making crops are being destroyed. Because of manure pollution from confinements and feedlots, people’s water and air are risky to drink and breathe. After ten years of the voluntary Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, Iowa’s waters and soils are more polluted than ever before.

The brain-eating amoeba, *naegleria fowleri*, recently killed a man who swam in an Iowa state park. That amoeba’s food is algae which grows in our waters because of all the nutrient pollution running off Iowa’s crop fields.

The Iowa legislature has made it illegal to regulate air pollution coming out of hog confinements, leaving the public with no way to protect themselves from the diseases and deaths from hydrogen-sulfide, ammonia, particulates, antibiotic resistant organisms and many other harmful toxins. Hog confinements also release the climate harming gas methane.

Because the Iowa Dept of Agriculture’s and the DNR’s budgets have been cut so drastically, officials say they don’t have the personnel to

timely investigate these issues; even though Iowa has a \$2 billion dollar surplus. People are left with gardens destroyed, and businesses that depend on growing products suffer losses they sometimes can’t replace. So many pollinators are killed by agricultural chemicals that plants in your garden may not have fruit because they have not been pollinated. These are a human being’s food and income. Humans are not machines.

Neonicotinoids (pollinator deaths), and PFAS (forever chemicals), are both used in industrial agriculture. They have now been found higher up in the food chain in deer. There are “don’t eat” advisories for some organs of deer.

Are those neonicotinoids and PFAS in us now? Should we be worried about the deer and fish and other animals that many of us eat? Why isn’t the government doing more about these issues?

Recently Governor Kim Reynolds signed a three year deal with Taiwan, which agreed to buy \$2.6 billion worth of corn and soybeans. It guarantees this industrial agricultural onslaught on Iowans’ health, ability to eat and earn a living, and environment will continue.

Who are the actual domestic terrorists?

Jessica Reznicek and Ruby Montoya News – February 2023  
Los Angeles Catholic Worker Agitator:

We request that you please write to Jessica Reznicek, who is serving an eight-year sentence for damaging the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2017, and her codefendant, Ruby Montoya, who is serving six years.

Jessica Reznicek #19293-030  
FCI Waseca, P.O. Box 1731  
Waseca, MN 5609

Ruby K Montoya #25915-508  
FMC Carswell, P.O. Box 27137  
Fort Worth, TX 76127



## ROAD TRIP REPORT, continued from page 1

After our visit with Liz we headed for Worcester and the National Gathering. As soon as we hit the parking lot of Blessed Sacrament Parish, I started connecting with Catholic Workers I had not seen for years. One of the first I saw was Phil Runkle, our beloved, retired Catholic Worker archivist from Marquette University in Milwaukee. We talked about our mothers, who had met and become friends at Sugar Creek retreat years back! I also connected with Vince Eirene from the Pittsburgh Worker. Last year I celebrated Vince's seventieth birthday with his friends in Pittsburgh. He's still kicking and still offering hospitality at this house.

We spent the first night at Blessed Sacrament with a banquet meal, followed by a night program and OPEN BAR!!! During the opening prayer led by Michael Boover, one of the founders of Mustard Seed, people were asked to remember our own Norman Searah. I had told Michael of Norman's condition earlier. Michael told the crowd that Norman was one of Mustard Seed's first dishwashers fifty years ago!

Everywhere I turned that first night, there was someone I knew personally and with whom I could reconnect. When the program started, I sat down at a table with Steve Jacobs of the Colombia, Missouri Worker House. I turned to my left and there was John Schuchardt! John got arrested with Steve and me at the Pentagon on August 9, 1977, my first arrest! I also reconnected with Claire Lewandowski and Ma Wilson, recent volunteers at the Des Moines Worker who stayed a month with us. The whole night was like that.

Saturday was filled with plenary sessions and workshops. No way can I share all that happened. My only regret is that I could not attend all of the workshops. There were only two workshop sessions scheduled, which meant you can only attend two. Because I was presenting a workshop, I was ultimately only able to attend one.

I went to the "Catholic Worker and the Catholic Church" workshop led by Rosalie Riegle and Amanda Daloisio. There were about thirty people attending the workshop, and we had only enough time for everyone in the circle to say something. And just like the Catholic Worker movement and the larger United States Catholic Church, every point of view was represented.

I was the second to the last to share. I gave a brief overview of the Des Moines Worker evolving history with our local Bishops, Diocese, and larger Church. I shared that we are now an ecumenical, interfaith, non-denominational, anarchist Catholic Worker. I expanded that we are currently seeking ways to lift an official church ban on celebrating mass at the house, courtesy of the local Bishop and Priest Council. This ban is their reaction to the fact that we had a woman celebrate mass at our fortieth anniversary. Go figure!

My workshop was titled "Jessica Reznicek and Ruby Montoya's Witness against the Dakota Access Pipeline." In it, I tried to place Jess and Ruby's Witness in the context of the Catholic Worker and Plowshares movements by telling the story of how Jess and Ruby came to do their actions as members of the Des Moines Catholic Worker. I gave an overview of their five year saga between witness and prison. I covered directly Ruby's betrayal of Jess, plus the need to address the domestic terrorism enhancements in their sentencing.

The betrayal I mentioned is real. Ruby cooperated with the feds and also made up lies about Jess, the Des Moines Catholic Worker, and many other real and unreal people. That is the problem with Ruby's defense and cooperation. It also did her no good. She got the same sentence if she had not cooperated and participated in the "rat system" with the feds.

Ruby is clearly a victim of the federal prosecutors and judges and a criminal legal system that is rotten to the core. Betrayal is built into the system. Ninety-five percent of the criminal cases in the federal system result in a guilty plea. You can't get that rate of plea bargains without a lot of "rats!"

Talking to Jess on the phone regarding Ruby's betrayal, I told her, "You know how I live for a good line and you're no Jesus, but what Ruby did to you is a real betrayal." I also told Jess she was going to need to forgive Ruby sooner or later. I told her she did not have to do it right away, "Take a month, take a year, take a couple years ... sooner or later you will need to forgive Ruby."

At the workshop I called for Catholic Workers to embrace Jess and Ruby's case

in two ways:

First, as Catholic Workers we should help bring about reconciliation between Jess and Ruby. Healing for Ruby. Strength for both of them to survive. It may help them to thrive in imprisonment. We also need to be welcoming communities when they are set free.

At the moment I have no idea how this is going to happen. For this reason, we need to pray. We will need some time. We will need to seek ways to reach out to Ruby and Jess and help set the stage for reconciliation. I call on any and all Catholic Worker who can reach out to Jess and Ruby and help start the process.

Second, to join the larger campaign to get the domestic terrorism enhancements dropped from their sentence and federal records.

The best way to give a taste of the Catholic Workers in attendance is to name the workshops I wished I could have attended with their presenters:

"How the Peacemaking Witness of Dorothy Day and the Berrigans' Impact our Faith Response to the Omnipresent Nuclear Peril and War Today" with Martha Hennessy, Art Laffin and Chris Spicer.

"What Could Trigger Nuclear War with Russia and China?" with Bruce Gagnon from the Global Network against Weapons and Nuclear Power.

"The Catholic Worker Movement in Europe." with Frits ter Kuile from the Jenet Noel Huis Amsterdam.

"Nonviolence and the Catholic Worker" with Fr Joe Mattern, Casa Esther Catholic Worker in Omro, Wisconsin.

"Sacramental Agriculture: Finding Our Way in the Circle of Life: with Mike Miles and Barb Kass, Anathoth Catholic Worker Farm. Luck Wisconsin.

"Where, Then, Shall We Go!?: Hospitality, Human Rights, and Resisting the Criminalization of the Homeless" with Mark Colville, Amistad Catholic Worker.

"Cult, Culture and Cultivation" with Mike Boover, Worcester Catholic Worker.

"Campaigning Toward Decolonization: Trying to Be a Faithful and Strategic Catholic Worker in the Struggle for Indigenous Justice" with Matt Harper, Los Angeles Catholic Worker.

"Covid 19: A conversation among friends" with Clare Grady, Fr. Charles Emmanuel McCarthy and John Schuchardt.

There was even a Catholic Worker Young People's Caucus for people under 40!

During the day there was a film crew interviewing people who know Tom Lewis, an artist and Draft Board Files activist who joined Holy Cross graduate Phil Berrigan for the Baltimore 4 and the Catonsville 9 Draft Board Raids! When I visited him a few years ago, he was living in a house right across the street from the Mustard Seed Catholic Worker. His house was filled with his paintings, old posters and painter's tools. And I got to share with the film crew about the afternoon I spent with Tom in his house, talking about how he did his artwork and how he gave me one of the drawings he made for a book Fr. Dan Berrigan wrote on Ezekiel. The painting is hanging in the dining room of Dingman Catholic Worker House in Des Moines (see photo).

Saturday night was the talent show and dance. Former Des Moines Catholic Worker, now big time New York Catholic Worker, Carmen Trotta, did his Elvis impersonation, and JoAnne Kennedy sang with Clare and Ellen Grady, Frida Berrigan, and others (JoAnn told me Carla Dawson had to stay in New York City to cover the houses.) Our own Austin Cook sang with a group!

The dance brought at least half the crowd to the floor, old and young alike! These folks know how to throw a party!

Sunday morning we had breakfast at Mustard Seed. We had to leave before the final closing mass. It was like leaving the wedding banquet right at the beginning. We also missed getting in the group photo (see photo).

On the way home, Austin and I gave Chris Clarke, a self-described roaming Catholic Worker and a delightful singer, a ride to Dayton, Ohio and the Little Bear Creek Community. It is a small community just outside the city limits, raising and marketing veggies and fruits from their own highway store and running a shipping and marketing wholesale business for a collective of small and big Amish/Brethren farm communes in the Midwest. It was such a delightful visit, we stayed an extra day in Dayton. On the whole, it was a deeply meaningful and exciting trip!



Group photo for the Catholic Worker National Gathering in front of Blessed Sacrament



Painting by Tom Lewis



# Former Des Moines Catholic Worker, Carla Dawson, Wins 2023 Bishop Dingman Peace Award

Carla Dawson joined the Des Moines Catholic Worker in 1989 and stayed for twelve years, raising her three sons, Julius, Josh, and Jordan. She earned her college degree and led the community for most of those years! She now lives at the New York City Catholic Worker along with former Des Moines Catholic Workers, Joann Kennedy and Carmen Trotta.

Read more about her achievements and award at <http://catholicpeaceministry.org/bishop-dingman-peace-award/>



# Prayers for Richard Flamer

Former Des Moines Catholic Worker, Richard Flammer, is back in Des Moines. He had a truck accident and was badly shook up. Araceli, Richard's wife and fellow Des Moines Catholic Worker, flew down to Chiapas to be with him. They flew back to Iowa so Richard could take advantage of the Veterans Hospital in Des Moines. He is dealing with long term heart and lung issues and will be in Des Moines for the foreseeable future.



Richard and Araceli back together in Des Moines

For more info contact Araceli Benitez-Moya: [aracelibenitezmoya@hotmail.com](mailto:aracelibenitezmoya@hotmail.com), 515.718.2144 Richard Flamer: [flamerrichard@gmail.com](mailto:flamerrichard@gmail.com)

## FOLLOWING THE WILL OF GOD, continued from page 4

will be able to install electricity in twelve homes to add to the 150 homes for which we have installed solar electricity. A \$220 donation will cover the entire cost, including transportation, installation, administration, and a three-bulb system that charges telephone batteries. We will be grateful for any size donation, small or large, to provide light in the dark for farm families on the Berlin Mountain in eastern El Salvador.

I want to invite you to see first-hand the environmental change your donation makes in the lives of those who receive solar electricity. I would like to organize a delegation of interested people to visit El Salvador and see the project and meet the people who benefit from the light we install, as well as to meet the five person team that does the installation and maintenance of the solar light project. Send a note to me, Robert Cook, 1317 8th Street, Des Moines, IA 50314 of your interest and I will send to you details about the delegation. The dates for the delegation to make that trip are still to be determined. I look forward to hearing from you.

Please remember we are accepting tax deductible donations for "A Legacy of Light" that we will use in 2024. A donation of any amount is very much appreciated.

Until next issue of *Via Pacis*, remember this penned by an unknown author: "The will of God will never take you where the grace of God will not protect you." Of that, I am a believer.

May peace be in your hearts and in your homes.

## NORMAN'S CELEBRATION OF LIFE, continued from page 6

we first got on, but he became increasingly concerned about the crowded conditions and all the people standing in the aisles when it filled to capacity along the route. When we got off, he told me he did not like New York City buses because they were dangerously crowded. We traveled by Uber from then on.

After our visit to Maryhouse, I took Norman out to dinner at a nice restaurant, and we returned to my apartment for the evening. Sunday morning, I took Norman to Battery Park City, a nice neighborhood by the World Trade Center and Financial District, for brunch at a high-end restaurant on the waterfront overlooking the marina. I asked Norman whether he would like to visit the Museum of Natural History or various other museums, a folk music concert, or other activities. He told me that he did not mean to insult me or my efforts at hospitality, but that he preferred to return to the bus station for the duration of his stay.

He said he liked the food at the restaurants and my house and that he had been enjoying his visit, but he preferred the food at the bus station and talking to new people he would meet there to visiting museums or other activities. He asked me to join him at the bus station for a few hours and said that I might find that a good time. I went to the bus station with him, and Norman gave me the grand tour. I stayed for a couple of hours and bought Norman an early dinner. Norman asked whether I preferred the bus station. I told him that it was interesting, but that I would not like to hang out there as he did. We agreed to disagree on this, and I departed, leaving Norman to enjoy the rest of his stay at the bus station.

Despite many people's best efforts, Norman would turn down finer accommodations to be with those he considered "my people." People noted that Norman was a dedicated activist as well as a humanitarian. Norman was known to have joined Catholic Worker actions and gatherings throughout the United States. Even at these events, Mike Miles from the Anathoth Catholic Worker Farm in Luck, Wisconsin shared how Norman chose to spend his nights on the streets with homeless people instead of the housing provided by host communities.

It was also noted Norman had his own views and ideas on achieving a more just and equitable world and would take direct action to implement them. Norman collected materials for school backpacks for Native American children in the Dakotas. He developed a proposal to stop building oil pipelines and instead build life-giving water pipelines to carry water from areas of the world flush with rain to those suffering from drought. Norman took this proposal directly to the United Nations in New York City and dropped it off with security, who promised to get it to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Barb Kass from the Anathoth Catholic Worker Farm concluded the celebration with an old Quaker prayer:

"We give them back to you, dear Lord, who gave them to us. Yet as you did not lose them in the giving, so we have not lost them by their return. For what is yours is ours always, if we are yours. And life is eternal and love is immortal and death is only a horizon. And a horizon is nothing more than the limit of our sight."

After the service refreshments were served. Austin Cook, a current member of the Des Moines Catholic Worker community brought his guitar out and played songs with Steve. People hung around and shared about Norman.

It was clear that by the Sermon on the Mount standards that Norman had lived a full, loving, adventurous, generous, and productive life over his forty-four plus years with the Des Moines Catholic Worker. His legacy will live on through all the people he helped, the lives he touched, and his many wood carvings and columns for the *Via Pacis*. Few can claim to have lived a fuller or better life. We will all miss you so very much, Norman.



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*via pacis*  
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# Via pacis

*The voice of the Des Moines Catholic Worker community*

MARCH 2023      WWW.DESMOINESCATHOLICWORKER.COM      VOLUME 47, NO. 1

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

Prayers . . . without them, nothing happens.

### VOLUNTEERS:

Individuals and work crews for hospitality (serving food, cleanup), cleaning and general inside and outside maintenance . . . without them, we burn out.

### FOOD:

Fruit, Vegetables, Meat and Fish, Milk, Cheese, Salted Butter, Olive Oil, Sugar, Coffee, Creamer, Juice (sugar free), Salt, Black Pepper, Fresh Garlic, Salad dressing, Soups and Stews (both canned and fresh). Leftovers from weddings, funerals and other social gatherings . . .

### MEAL PROVIDERS:

Provide a meal for 100 people once a month! Call or email for current openings: 515-214-1030, dmccatholicworker@gmail.com

### HEALTH AND

#### HYGIENE:

Menstrual Hygiene Items, Diapers, Baby Formula, Tylenol, Ibuprofen, Multivitamins, Antibiotic Ointment, Band-Aids, Lip balm

### TOILETRIES:

Disposable Razors, Shaving Cream, Shampoo, Conditioner, Lotion, Deodorant, Soap, Toothpaste (Small sizes preferred for handout), Toothbrushes and Toilet Paper.

### NEEDED CLOTHING:

Underwear, Socks, T-shirts, Sweatshirts, Hoodies, Coats, Work Pants. (All Sizes, Especially Big) Sleeping Bags, Blankets

### HOUSEHOLD

#### SUPPLIES:

Bleach, Laundry Detergent, Environmentally-Friendly Dish Soap, Murphy's Oil Soap, Pinesol, Trash Bags, Brooms, Rugs, Candles, Energy-Efficient Light Bulbs, Aluminum Foil, Plastic Wrap, Sandwich and Freezer Bags, Bath Towels, Playing Cards, Candles, Phone Chargers

### HOUSE REPAIRS:

With four old houses, there are plenty of projects large and small. We invite do-it-yourself-ers--individuals or groups--with skills in carpentry, plumbing, painting, electrical, etc. to come in, look over our housing needs, and choose a project. Bring your own tools if possible.

### LIBRARY:

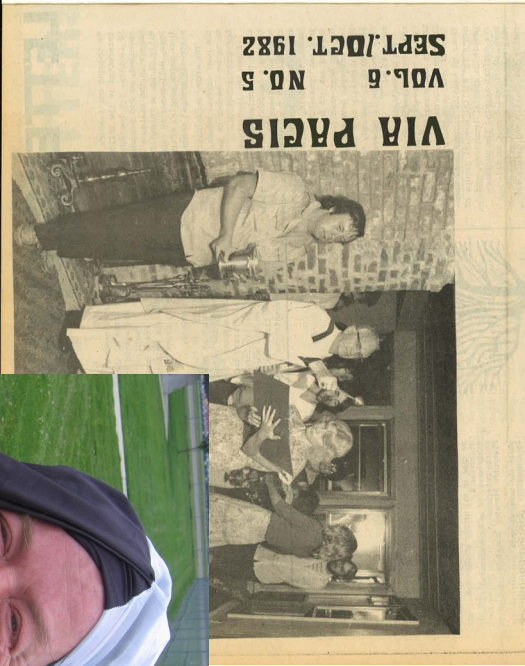
Peace and Justice books for the Berrigan House Library

### \$CASH MONEY\$:

Cash donations are essential to pay our property taxes, utilities, repair and maintenance of property, upkeep and gas for two vans, purchase of needed supplies, our community gardening and for the continued publication and mailing of the *via pacis*, a good twenty percent of our annual expenses.

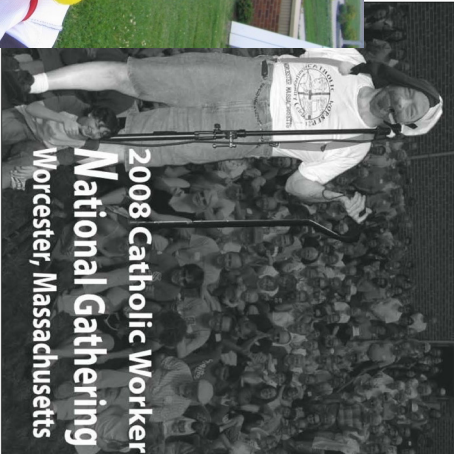
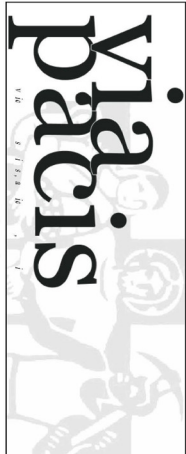
### DMCW WEBSITE

Our website has recently been redone! Please visit us at [www.desmoinescatholicworker.com](http://www.desmoinescatholicworker.com). You can also visit [www.viapacis.wordpress.com](http://www.viapacis.wordpress.com) for an online version of the *via pacis*.



## RIP NORMAN SEARAH

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